

Mozart's Nocturnal Habits Are Disproved by Historical Evidence

To the Editor—In a recent Letter to the Editor, Grant and Pilz¹ propose the hypothesis of a contribution of very low serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D levels to provoke Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's death. Mozart died on the 5th of December, 1791, aged 35, probably due to an infection which, very likely, had low vitamin D levels as an important risk factor. According to Grant and Pilz, the lack of vitamin D is to be attributed, in the case of Mozart's, to insufficient exposure to sunlight, because he "did much of his composing at night, so would have slept during much of the day." Historical evidence, however, disproves the nocturnal habits of the Austrian composer.

Facts about Mozart's everyday life are mostly known from his abundant correspondence with his family and acquaintances. During the last months of his life, his wife Contanze was away from home twice, from the beginning of June to mid-July, 1791, and during 2 weeks in October of the same year, for health reasons.² Mozart wrote to her practically every day. The letters from those two periods are particularly rich in domestic particulars, including details about schedules, appointments, and meals. The following excerpts are especially illuminating.³

June 6: "I write this letter in the small room in Leitgeb's garden, where I have slept outstandingly last night." (Joseph Leutgeb, or Leitgeb, was a friend of the Mozarts.)

June 11: "I must hurry because it is already a quarter to 7—and the mail coach leaves at 7 o'clock . . . I composed an aria for my opera today. I got up at half past four this morning . . . I will be eating at Puchberg's." (At the time, Mozart was composing *The Magic Flute*. Michael Puchberg was one of Mozart's creditors.)

June 12: "It is now half past 10 and we'll be eating at 12 o'clock."

June 25: "In fact, I slept very well—although the mice kept me pretty good company . . . I was already up before five o'clock."

July 7: "I . . . can't let him get away—I'm at his place every day at 7 o'clock in the morning."

October 7, at half past 10 at night: "I've just come back from the opera . . . But now to my daily life: right after you sailed off, I played 2 games of billiards . . . Then I sold my old nag for 14 ducats—after that I had Joseph get Primus to fetch me some black coffee . . . Then I orchestrated almost the entire rondo of the Stadler concerto . . . At half past five in the afternoon I . . . took my favorite walk along the Glacis to the theatre . . . I am now eating at your health—the clock is striking 11 o'clock." (Since September 30, *The Magic Flute* was being performed almost daily, and Mozart would write to his wife after coming back from the theatre, while having dinner. Anton Stadler was

the clarinetist for whom Mozart composed the Clarinet Concerto K. 622. Joseph and Primus were two servants.)

October 8, at half past 10 at night: "This morning I worked with such concentration that it was suddenly half past 1 o'clock . . . I dashed off to Hofer's, simply because I didn't want to eat alone . . . After table I went back home and continued working until it was time to go to the opera." [In the same letter, next day at 7 am]: "I slept very well . . . At 10 o'clock I will go to mass. . ." (Franz Hofer was one of Mozart's brothers-in-law.)

October 14: "Yesterday . . . I drove out to see Carl; we had lunch there . . . at 6 o'clock I fetched Salieri and Mme. Cavalieri with a carriage and took them to my box. . . . After the performance I took them home and then had supper with Carl. . . we both slept heavenly . . . I'm really quite satisfied with Primus; he let me down just once, forcing me to sleep over at Hofer's, which annoyed me very much because they get up too late for my taste" (Carl was Mozart and Constanze's child who, at the time, was attending a boarding school. Antonio Salieri was the well-known Italian composer, and Caterina Cavalieri was an opera singer. Both were invited by Mozart to watch a performance of *The Magic Flute*.)

These eloquent passages leave little doubt that Mozart's custom was as diurnal as that of any ordinary Viennese of his time. Moreover, there are no reasons to assume that things were different in other periods of his life: besides composing, his intense activities—travels, performances, social meetings, teaching—required him to observe quite normal schedules. His exposure to sunlight should have been close to the average of his contemporaries in Central Europe.

It is important that sound interdisciplinary research—such as, in the present case, retrospective medical diagnosis applied to a historical character—is based on reasonably complete, reliable information from all the domains involved in the problem. In this case, as for the historical side, such information was readily available from standard sources.

DAMIÁN H. ZANETTE, PhD

Instituto Balseiro

8400 San Carlos de Bariloche

Río Negro, Argentina

zanette@cab.cnea.gov.ar

1. Grant WB, Pilz, S: Vitamin D deficiency contributed to Mozart's death [letter]. *Med Probl Perform Art* 2011;26(2):117.
2. Hildesheimer W: Mozart. New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982.
3. Spaethling R: Mozart's Letters, Mozart's Life. London, W. W. Norton and Co., 2000.

I would like to thank Dr. M. Montemurro, from the University of Manchester, for bringing Grant and Pilz's Letter to my attention.